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INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 6908
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 4254
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 8138
RUEHBW/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 5390
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2621
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2781
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3530
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4711
RUEHQD/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5252
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 9853
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 001862

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TAGS: ECON PGOV PREL BL

SUBJECT: DINH AFFAIR FALL-OUT UPDATE

REF: LA PAZ 1831

Classified By: Amb. Philip S. Goldberg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador's Fourth of July reception was marked by a lower turnout of high-level Bolivian officials compared to last year's. This appears to have been the result of a conscious GOB decision after the Donna Dinh affair (reflets). The most senior current GOB official to attend was the foreign minister, although there was surprisingly strong turn-out from senior Bolivian military officials. Quite a few of these officers expressed their dissatisfaction with the manner in which the GOB was handling the Dinh affair. Following the reception, the Ambassador met with Foreign Minister Choquehuanca to reiterate the U.S. desire to put this affair behind us. Choquehuanca asserted the GOB's intention to continue pursuing this issue, but accepted the Ambassador's proposal that this incident be confined to diplomatic channels from now on. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Attendance at the Ambassador's July Fourth reception was down from last year's event, with a lower-ranking group of GOB officials. (Not surprisingly, the opposition turned out in force.) Last year Vice President Alvaro Garcia Linera attended; this year the highest ranking GOB official in attendance was Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca. The biggest surprise of the day was that senior military brass showed up in strength. A number of these officers privately offered their views that the manner in which the GOB was handling the Donna Dinh incident was excessive, and several ranking officials told the DCM that they were lobbying the defense minister to continue with his previously scheduled visit to the Pentagon July 18th. (Note: Post understands that this may no longer be possible from the DOD side even if the decision were changed. End Note.)

¶3. (C) The Ambassador pulled Choquehuanca aside as he was leaving and expressed disapproval of Minister of Government Alfredo Rada's July 3rd attacks on the Embassy's handling of the Dinh affair. The Ambassador noted that he thought he had the GOB's commitment to put this question behind us, as a political issue; Choquehuanca demurred, and while noting that GOB public comments would be more restrained, the GOB would continue to pursue a full investigation of the incident. The Ambassador noted that if the GOB were to investigate its own

internal rules and procedures, this was naturally a sovereign decision for the GOB. On the other hand, the U.S. had and will continue to address GOB inquiries through diplomatic channels.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Despite our repeated admonitions, the GOB seems unwilling to put the Dinh affair behind it. Nonetheless, and despite what appears to be considerable pressure from GOB hardliners to continue pressing this case, the foreign minister seems to accept the need to keep further dialogue on this matter within diplomatic channels. Indeed, on July 5th post received a diplomatic note requesting a deposition for the country team member involved and his family (Septel). Post late in the day also received a note indicating the GOB's belief that TSA and American Airline regulations had been violated, as had Bolivian customs law. We are now coordinating our response with the Legal Advisor's Office. In addition, it appears that the media in general have realized that there is far less story in this story than the GOB was having them believe, and press coverage is now fading to the back pages. We will try to keep it there, but given the GOB's consistent refusal to do the right thing on this issue, we do no believe that this incident is behind us. To keep the issue alive, the GOB has now returned to the original issue instead of pressing conspiracy theories or outrageous charges of US-backed terrorism. However, it is clear that DAS Patrick Duddy's strong intervention with Ambassador Guzman in Washington on July 2 made a big impression on the GOB. The idea that the GOB was in the process of badly damaging our relationship -- and benefits that accrue to Bolivia -- had an impact. End Comment.

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